

Abstract

The master thesis **“The Relations between the Polish United Workers’ Party and the French Communist Party in 1956”** deals with the relations between the Central European Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) and the West European French Communist Party (PCF) in the crisis year of 1956. Analysing their mutual relations in 1956 is not only interesting from the point of view of East-West connections, but chiefly of the different approaches to Khrushchev’s policy of destalinisation. Whereas the PCF was more or less under the Stalinist Maurice Thorez’s control, which prevented Khrushchev’s French supporters from influencing their party’s politics, in case of the PZPR, the death of Bolesław Bierut in March 1956 made room for larger variety of opinions within the party. This master thesis describes not only the situation of both parties in 1956. It also analyses the images that the parties made about each other and the ways in which these images were spread and how they influenced the relations between them. The striking difference laid in the approach to the destalinisation. The parties perceived differently Khrushchev’s “secret speech”. The PCF leadership firstly denied its existence and later on claimed they did not know about it. The PZPR leadership decided to distribute the copies of the secret speech among their party members. Consequently, both parties took different attitude towards the uprising in Hungary in autumn 1956. Unlike their Polish counterparts, the French communists condemned the Hungarian events at the very beginning and welcomed the Soviet intervention enthusiastically. In both the PCF and Poland long-lasting images—stereotypes—can be found. Poland saw the PCF as a party of the Second World War heroes, French communists looked up to Poland as to a socialist country. Criticism always followed when the reality in the other country deviated from these established images. For Polish communists any continuation in Stalinism was a deflection from the PCF heroic tradition; the French communists criticised Poles when they concluded that the events in Poland diverged from the socialist direction. Discourse was an essential part of the image creation process. The main difference was based on the conception of destalinisation. The PCF did not accept destalinisation and therefore it could not accept its discourse either and it remained in the discourse of the Stalinist era. This caused one of the reasons for press polemics between French and Polish communists. The contacts between the members of PCF and PZPR became a key point of the mutual relations in 1956. These contacts could have resulted in a criticism against Thorez’s leadership and thus were feared.